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TITLE: Clean Needles from Pharmacies-How to Make It Happen

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ISSUE: Health departments and community activists have worked across the country to establish needle exchange programs to reduce HIV transmission in injection drug users and their partners, but only four states have taken steps to modify or repeal laws of regulations which restrict pharmacy-based syringe sales to IDUs.

SETTING: Relevant to most states. The intervention to be promoted is a policy level (structural) intervention. The target audience is health department and community activists, who need to be convinced that these issues are important HIV prevention interventions, and to understand how to find community partners to support the changes.

PROJECT: The presentation will include: (1) description of the impact of changes in prescription and paraphernalia laws in Connecticut; (2) description of more recent changes in Maine, Minnesota and Rhode Island; (3) why pharmacies, in addition to needle exchange programs, are important for syringe access by injection drug users; (4) discussion of community partners, including pharmacists and law enforcement officials, who can help promote these policy changes.

RESULTS: Connecticut's results show a 39% decrease in syringe sharing among drug users after the prescription law was changed. Legislators in four states have supported legislation to reduce the impact of prescription and paraphernalia laws. In 1999, the American Pharmaceutical Association, the national pharmacists' organization, voted to support unrestricted sale of syringes in pharmacies in an effort to decrease transmission of bloodborne diseases.

LESSONS LEARNED: Pharmacy sale of syringes and decriminalization of syringes possession can reduce HIV risk in injection drug users. Legislators can be convinced to change laws in order to reduce AIDS transmission. Community partners, including pharmacists and police, can help to change the laws.

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